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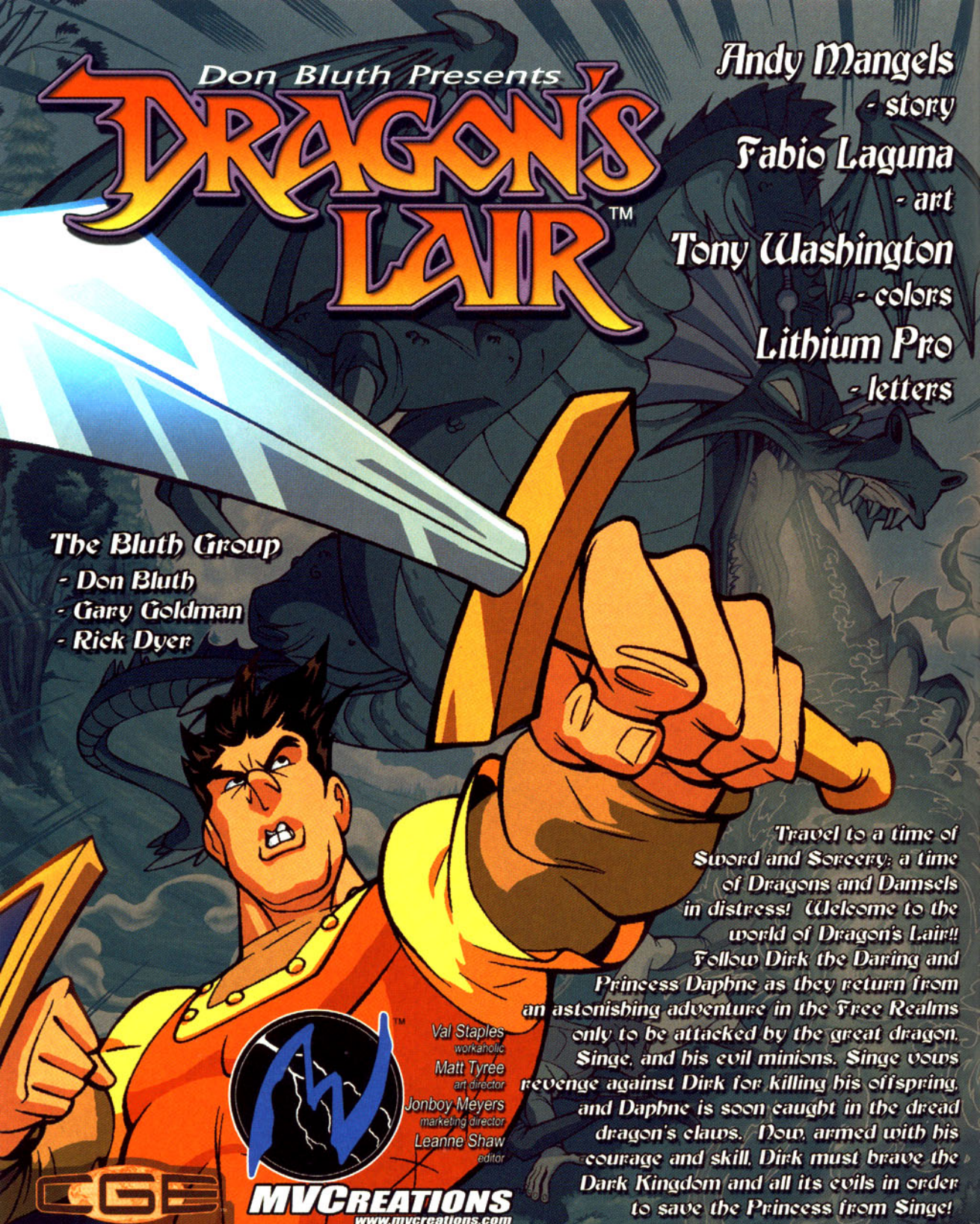
Don Bluth Presents
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Fabio Laguna
- art
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- Don Bluth
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Travel to a time of Sword and Sorcery: a time of Dragons and Damsels in distress! Welcome to the world of Dragon's Lair!! Follow Dirk the Daring and Princess Daphne as they return from an astonishing adventure in the Free Realms only to be attacked by the great dragon, Singe, and his evil minions. Singe vows revenge against Dirk for killing his offspring, and Daphne is soon caught in the dread dragon's claws. Now, armed with his courage and skill, Dirk must brave the Dark Kingdom and all its evils in order to save the Princess from Singe!
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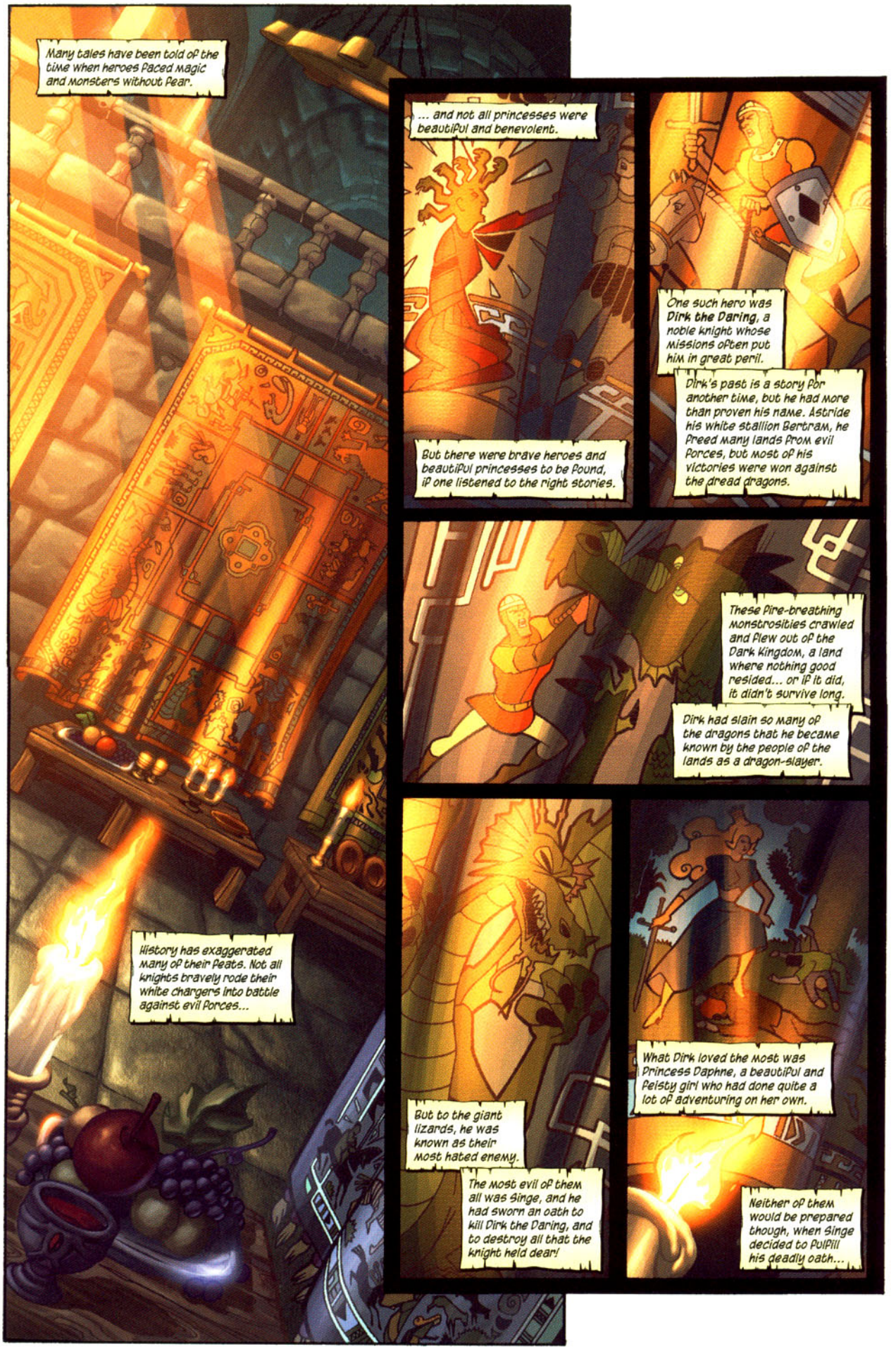
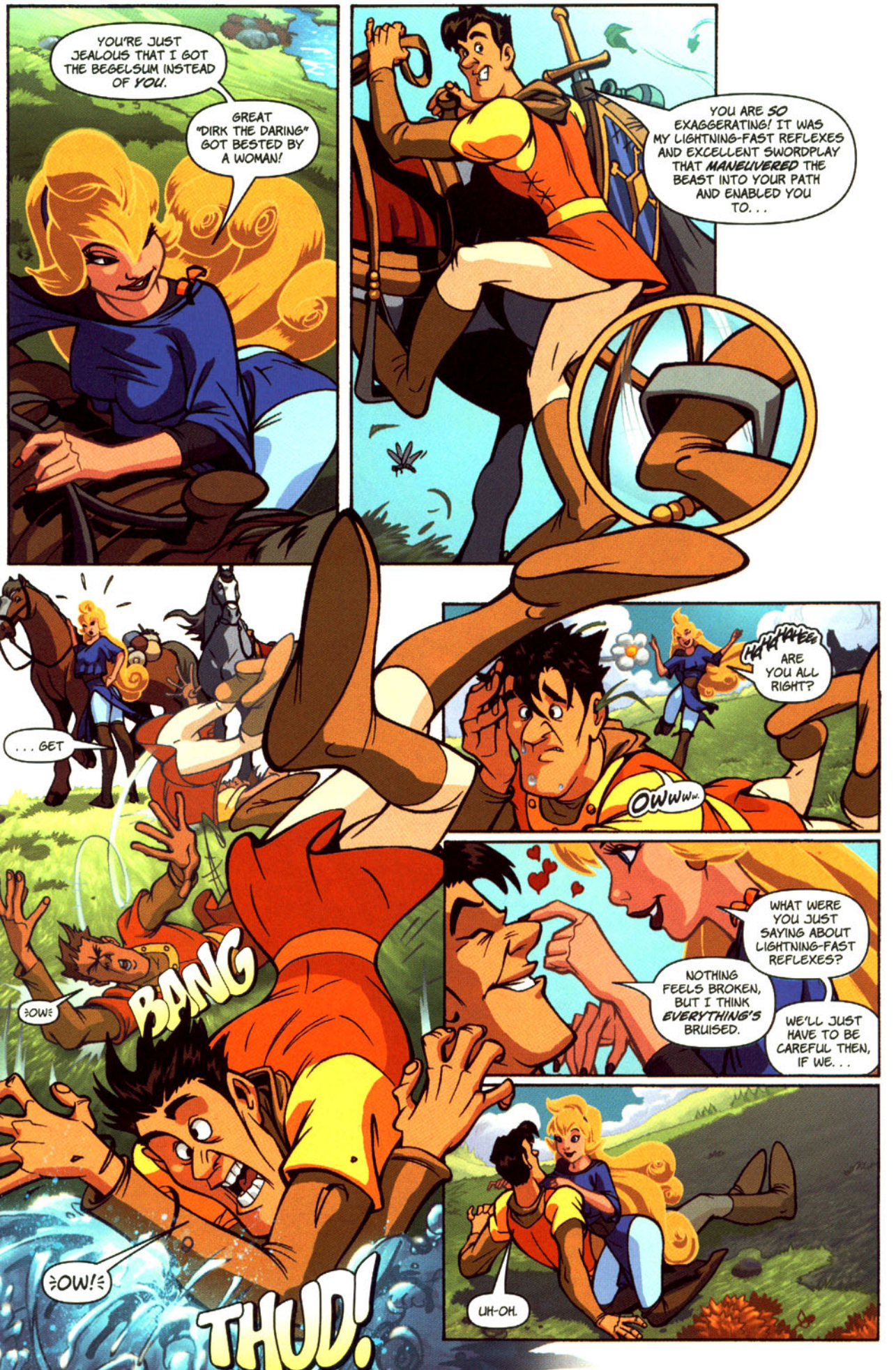
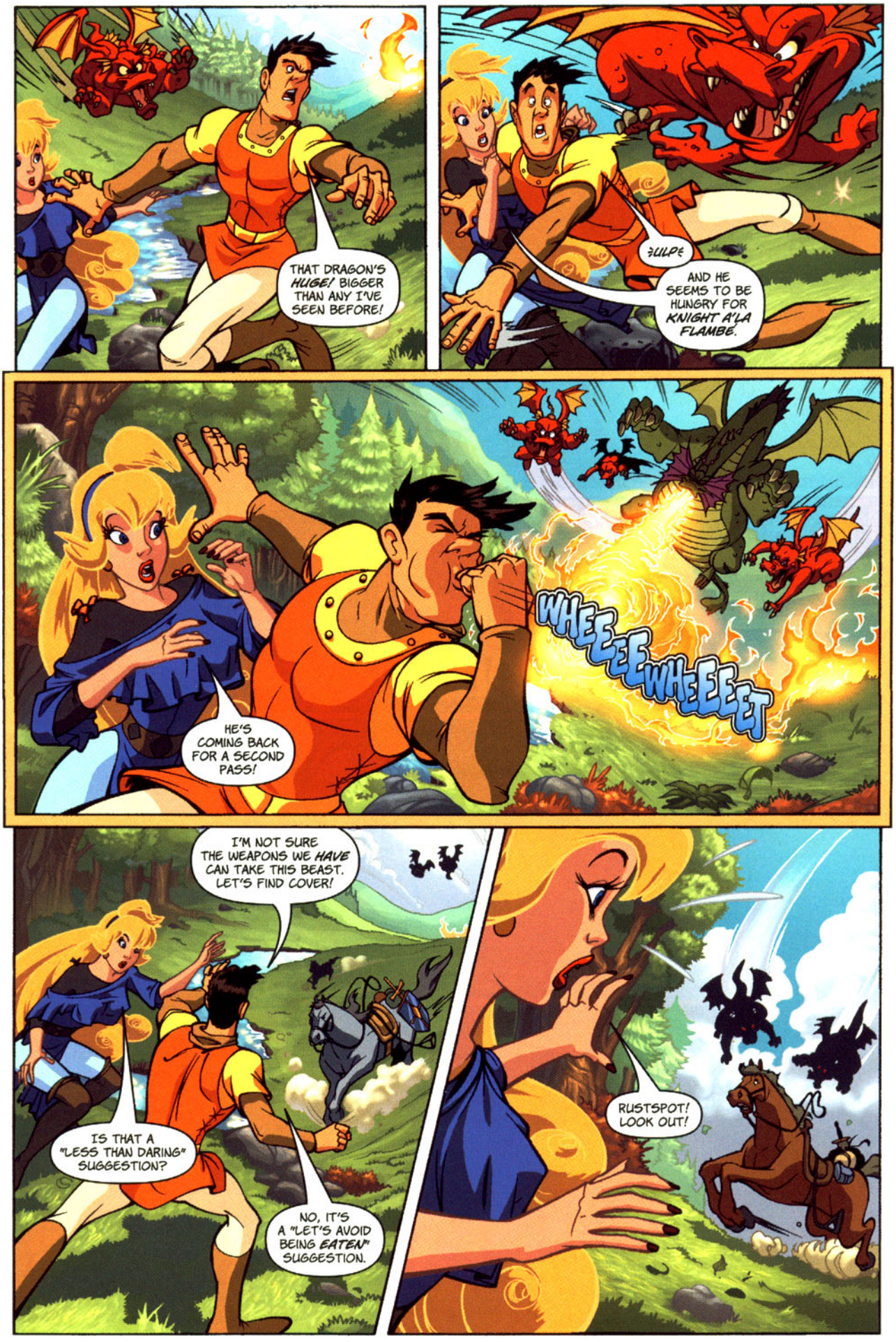

Many tales have been told of the time when heroes faced magic and monsters without fear.
... and not all princesses were beautiful and benevolent.
But there were brave heroes and beautiful princesses to be found, if one listened to the right stories.
One such hero was **Dirk the Daring**, a noble knight whose missions often put him in great peril.
Dirk's past is a story for another time, but he had more than proven his name. Astride his white stallion Bertram, he freed many lands from evil forces, but most of his victories were won against the dread dragons.
These fire-breathing monstrosities crawled and flew out of the Dark Kingdom, a land where nothing good resided... or if it did, it didn't survive long.
Dirk had slain so many of the dragons that he became known by the people of the lands as a dragon-slayer.
History has exaggerated many of their feats. Not all knights bravely rode their white chargers into battle against evil forces...
But to the giant lizards, he was known as their most hated enemy.
The most evil of them all was Singe, and he had sworn an oath to kill Dirk the Daring, and to destroy all that the knight held dear!
What Dirk loved the most was Princess Daphne, a beautiful and feisty girl who had done quite a lot of adventuring on her own.
Neither of them would be prepared though, when Singe decided to fulfill his deadly oath...

Taerwan's Lake, at the Outer Forest of the Free Realms.
I'M JUST SAYING I'D RATHER STAY OUT *HERE*, ADVENTURING.
BUT WHEN THE KING ASKS A FAVOR, YOU CAN'T EXACTLY REFUSE.
HE'S PUTTING A LOT OF TRUST IN YOU, DAPHNE.
UGH! IT'S NOT AS IF THE KINGDOM WILL *CEASE FUNCTIONING* JUST BECAUSE HE'S GONE. THIS IS ONE OF THE BEST-GOVERNED AREAS IN ALL THE KNOWN LANDS.
WELL, EXCEPT FOR THAT LITTLE SCANDAL WITH *LADY TARNELIA*. AND THE RASH OF SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION AMONG THE STABLEBOYS.
THOUGH I SUSPECT *THAT* HAD MORE TO DO WITH THE FOUL VAPORS FROM THE UNCLEAN STABLES *AND* THE FACT THAT THEY WERE SMOKING ON DUTY.
YOU LOVE TO GO OFF ON *TANGENTS* SOMETIMES, DON'T YOU?
I'M JUST SAYING THAT GOVERNING THE LAND WHILE THE KING AND HIS ENTOURAGE ARE OFF ON SOME QUEST – WHICH I HAVE MY SUSPICION IS JUST A *VACATION*, MIND YOU – IS *NOT* MY IDEA OF A GOOD USE OF MY CHARMS.
OF COURSE NOT. THE *BEST* USE OF YOUR CHARMS IS CLEARLY IN BEHEADING FEROCIOUS BEGELSUM MONSTERS RAMPAGING THROUGH THE WESTERN GLADE.
OR IN BEHEADING THE GORGONS. OR EVEN IN BEHEADING THE MOANING FRICKET.
COME TO THINK OF IT, YOU DO A *LOT* OF BEHEADING. PERHAPS WE SHOULD GET THE BALLADEER TO COMPOSE A SONG ABOUT YOU? WE COULD CALL IT "THE PRINCESS AND THE GUILLOTINE."

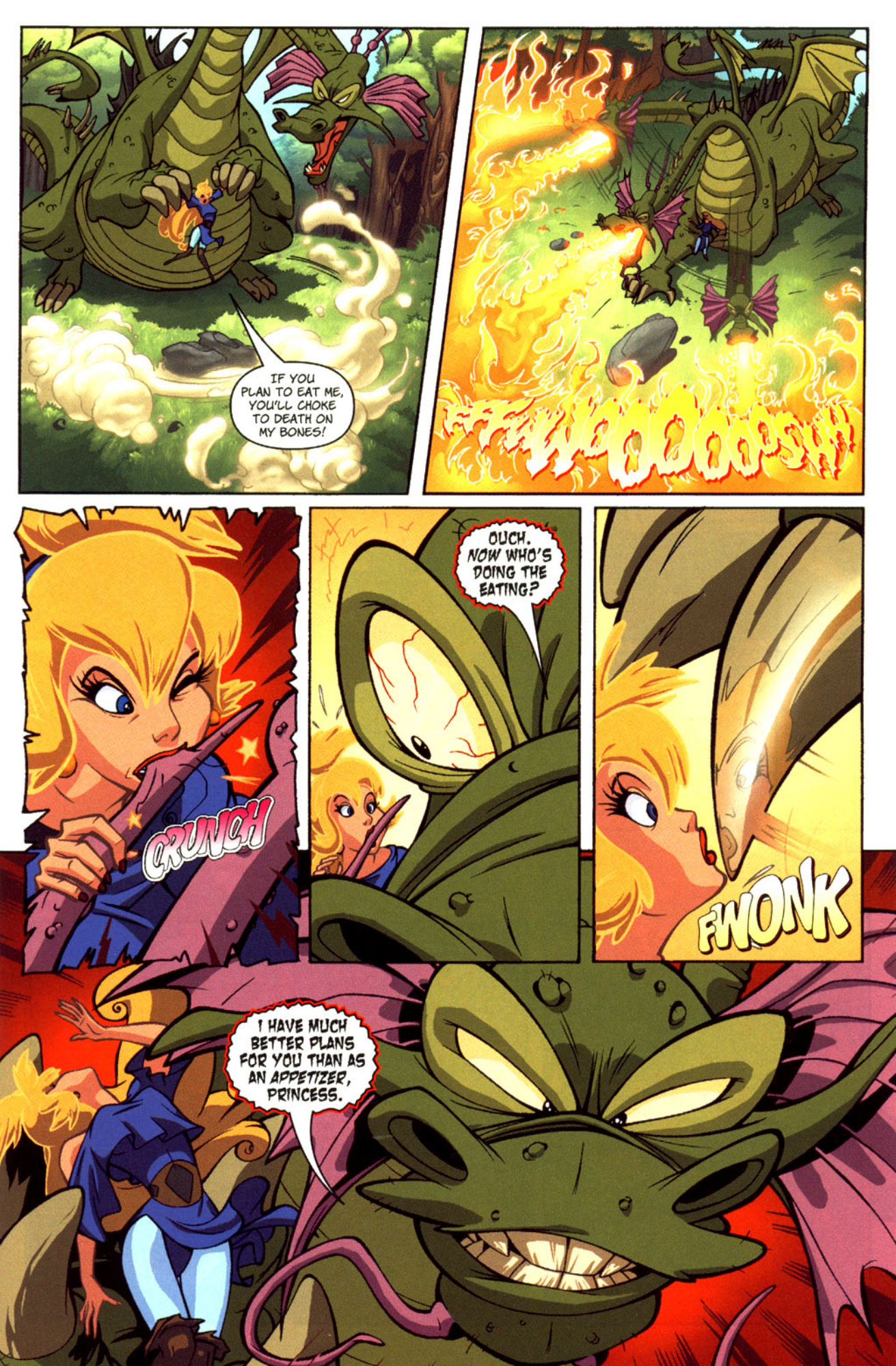

YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS THAT I GOT THE BEGELSUM INSTEAD OF YOU.
GREAT "DIRK THE DARING" GOT BESTED BY A WOMAN!
YOU ARE SO EXAGGERATING! IT WAS MY LIGHTNING-FAST REFLEXES AND EXCELLENT SWORDPLAY THAT MANEUVERED THE BEAST INTO YOUR PATH AND ENABLED YOU TO. . .
. . . GET
HAHAHAEE
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
OWWWW.
BANG
OW!
WHAT WERE YOU JUST SAYING ABOUT LIGHTNING-FAST REFLEXES?
NOTHING FEELS BROKEN, BUT I THINK EVERYTHING'S BRUISED.
WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BE CAREFUL THEN, IF WE. . .
OW!
THUD!
UH-OH.


THAT DRAGON'S HUGE! BIGGER THAN ANY I'VE SEEN BEFORE!
GULP!
AND HE SEEMS TO BE HUNGRY FOR KNIGHT A'LA FLAMBÉ.
WHEEEEWHEEEET
HE'S COMING BACK FOR A SECOND PASS!
I'M NOT SURE THE WEAPONS WE HAVE CAN TAKE THIS BEAST. LET'S FIND COVER!
IS THAT A "LESS THAN DARING" SUGGESTION?
NO, IT'S A "LET'S AVOID BEING EATEN" SUGGESTION.
RUSTSPOT! LOOK OUT!

GET AWAY FROM HER!
BONK
THUD
REVENGE!
DAPHNE!
FFFFOOOOSH

HE'S GOT SOME BAD BREATH!
OUW!! HOT FOOT!
I KNOW YOU DON'T WANT TO, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO GET ON BERTRAM AND GET OUT OF HERE. IT'S CLEARLY ME THE DRAGON WANTS!
YOU'RE RIGHT. I DON'T WANT TO. BUT SINCE RUSTSPOT JUST RAN OFF WITH MY WEAPONS, FIGHTING MIGHT BE A BIT DIFFICULT.
I'LL TRY TO *AHEM* DRAW THEIR FIRE.
JUST GO!
AND I'LL TELL THE SHIELD PAINTER TO GET READY TO PAINT ANOTHER DRAGON!
PREPARE TO MEET YOUR DOOM, DRAGON!

YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH, DRAGON'S SLAYER!
CRACK
WHOOOOSHH
OOOOF
THUD
LET ME GO, YOU OVERGROWN GECKO!
DAPHNE!
SHLUNK


IF YOU PLAN TO EAT ME, YOU'LL CHOKE TO DEATH ON MY BONES!
WOOOOSH!
CRUNCH
OUCH. NOW WHO'S DOING THE EATING?
FWONK
I HAVE MUCH BETTER PLANS FOR YOU THAN AS AN APPETIZER, PRINCESS.

YOU CAN LET HER GO *BEFORE* YOU'RE DEAD, OR *AFTER* YOU'RE DEAD, DRAGON!
YOUR CHOICE.
OOOOH, I'M TREMBLING DOWN TO MY TINIEST SCALES, DIRK THE DARING.
OR SHOULD I CALL YOU "DIRK THE *DINNER?*"
SCHLUCKK
SQUIRCH

LAST CHANCE, DRAGON! DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY OF YOUR KIND I'VE KILLED?
FFWOOOSH
HOT HOT HOT!
OF COURSE ! KNOW HOW MANY YOU'VE KILLED, DIRK.
WHY DO YOU THINK !, THE GREAT SINGE, WANTS REVENGE AGAINST YOU?
WHO DO YOU THINK WAS THE FATHER OF ALL THOSE DRAGONS?
GULP
YOU'RE GOING TO SUFFER MORE THAN ! EVER DID. . .

HUP!
YOU ARE TENACIOUS, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT.
AND YOU'RE A BIG TARGET!
YOOOWWWL
DIRK?
UH OH
TOO BAD YOU DON'T HAVE WINGS, KNIGHT!

KRAK
ULP!
THOK
ARP!
KRUNK
KK
WHOOOSH
THUNK

DIRK! NOOOOOO!!
YOU WON'T MISS HIM FOR MUCH LONGER, MY BLONDE BEAUTY!
YOU'D BETTER DROP ME TOO, OR I'LL SEE YOU DEAD!
YOU KNOW, I THINK I'LL MISS THIS FEISTY ATTITUDE OF YOURS THE MOST.
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

NEEEEEIIGGGHH
CHOCK
CAFF
HACK
LET'S GO...
RESCUE DAPHNE...
NO...

I'LL FIND YOU, SINGE! AND KILL YOU!
AND I'LL GET DAPHNE BACK.
COME ON, BERTRAM. BACK TO THE KING'S CASTLE, AND WE'LL FIND A WAY TO GET TO SINGE!
AND MAYBE GET SOME SALVES FOR THESE BRUISES, BURNS AND BREAKS.
OUCH.

WELCOME BACK, SIR DIRK!
WHERE IS THE PRINCESS?
SHE'S BEEN TAKEN.
DID I HEAR CORRECTLY? THE PRINCESS HAS BEEN TAKEN?
YES, LERAENE. A DRAGON NAMED SINGE STOLE HER AWAY AS WE WERE RETURNING HERE. I'M ALIVE ONLY BY THE BAREST OF CHANCES.
WE MUST MOUNT A RESCUE MISSION. I'LL CALL TOGETHER THE KNIGHTS TO RESCUE SWEET DAPHNE.
THERE'S BARELY ANYONE *HERE*, IS THERE? YOU MAY BE CAPTAIN OF THE PALACE GUARDS, LERAENE, BUT THE BROTHERHOOD OF KNIGHTS TRAVELS WITH THE KING.
TRUE, BUT I WOULD RISK MY *LIFE* TO LOOK ON THE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS ONCE AGAIN.
FIRST, WE NEED TO FIND OUT *WHAT* AND *WHERE* THIS SINGE IS. AND I THINK THIS DEAD FIRE DRAKE CAN HELP US. WHERE IS HALVERN?

...AND THEN SINGE KNOCKED ME OFF HIS TAIL AND I FELL INTO THE BURNING WOODS. GIVEN THE TUMBLE I TOOK, I SHOULD HAVE BEEN KILLED.
YOU ALWAYS SEEM TO HAVE UNCANNY LUCK, DIRK, LIKE YOU'VE GOT EXTRA LIVES. ARE YOU SURE YOU AREN'T ENCHANTED?
WAS DAPHNE ALL RIGHT?
LAST I SAW, SHE WAS CLUTCHED IN SINGE'S CLAWS.
SINGE? I THINK HE'S ONE OF THE LEGENDARY ELDER DRAGONS.
CAN YOU GET ANY INFORMATION OUT OF THIS FIRE DRAKE?
IT'S DEAD, DIRK.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I ASKED.
I DIDN'T SAY THAT.
GO AHEAD AND SAY IT. "THE WIZARD COULD DO IT." JUST CALL MORE ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT I'M JUST THE APPRENTICE.
OF COURSE YOU DIDN'T SAY IT. NO ONE NEEDS TO SAY IT OUT LOUD. I CAN SEE IT IN EVERYONE'S FACE. BUT AT LEAST NO ONE EVER BOTHERS ME FOR LOVE SPELLS ANYMORE.
SHUNK SHUNK
NOT AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO DELKIN.
IT LOOKS LIKE WE MAY HAVE SOMETHING HERE.

OICHAN GNITTA VO SLEH MAERG NEST
THERE YOU HAVE IT. APPARENTLY, THIS DRAKE HAS BEEN TAKING A TOUR THROUGH THE DARK KINGDOM.
I RECOGNIZE THE LIZARD KING, BUT NOT THE OTHERS.
THAT'S THE SANDS OF FIRE. SIR BARTEL BARELY ESCAPED FROM THERE LAST YEAR. THAT CASTLE IS BEYOND THE SANDS.
I DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. BUT I THINK THERE'S SOME WARNING ABOUT SINGE IN THE BOOK.
SO, WHERE DID SINGE TAKE DAPHNE?

DO YOU HAVE ANY REASON TO BELIEVE SINGE WANTED DAPHNE FOR ANY REASON OTHER THAN TO EAT HER?
HE KEPT TALKING ABOUT REVENGE MORE THAN HUNGER. HE SEEMED PRETTY TICKED THAT I'D KILLED SO MANY OF HIS CHILDREN.
I MEAN IT'S NOT MY FAULT THEY WERE EVIL TO THE CORE...
I'M DRAWING YOU A MAP OF THE DARK KINGDOM... OR AT LEAST AS MUCH AS WE KNOW ABOUT IT.
IT'S DAPHNE!
WOW! IS THAT HOW SHE DRESSED WHEN YOU TWO WERE OFF "ADVENTURING?"
I WISH.
I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.
HERE IT IS, THE BUBBLE OF HELOTRY. IT'S A MAGICAL BUBBLE FIRST USED IN ANCIENT CALDERA.
IF DAPHNE'S IN THIS, HER DAYS ARE NUMBERED. SINGE MUST PLAN TO USE IT TO MAGICALLY ENSLAVE HER.
IF SHE'S NOT RESCUED BY THE DAWN OF THE NEXT FULL MOON, HER MIND WILL BE MOLDED INTO WHATEVER SINGE DESIRES!

BUT THERE ARE ONLY TWO DAYS BEFORE THE NEXT FULL MOON!
I'VE GOT TO RESCUE DAPHNE AND DESTROY SINGE.
YES, YOU'VE SAID THAT ALREADY. BUT IT'S EASIER SAID THAN DONE, DIRK.
ACCORDING TO THIS BOOK, SINGE CANNOT BE KILLED WITH CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS. YOU MUST USE THE ENCHANTED SWORD DRAGONFANG.
THERE'S ALWAYS A CATCH. SO, WHERE CAN I FIND THIS SWORD?
IT'S PROBABLY HIDDEN SOMEWHERE IN SINGE'S CASTLE.
IF IT CAN DESTROY HIM, HE'S GOING TO TAKE EVERY EFFORT TO GUARD IT AND MAKE SURE IT DOESN'T GET INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO WANT TO KILL HIM. HE'S PROBABLY ENCASED THE WEAPON IN DRAGON'S AMBER. GOOD LUCK GETTING IT OUT OF THERE.
LET ME GET THE FEW KNIGHTS WHO ARE HERE. WE'LL RIDE OUT WITH YOU AND RESCUE DAPHNE TOGETHER.
NO. THE CASTLE AND THE KINGDOM NEED TO BE DEFENDED. AND SOMEONE MUST FOLLOW ME... IF I FALL.
I'M GOING ALONE. I'LL FIND A WAY TO SAVE DAPHNE.

"The trip through the Dark Kingdom will be full of danger, even for a valiant knight such as you, Dirk."
"On your quest, you will encounter treacherous monsters and dangerous obstacles."
"Evil magicks and many awesome forces will oppose you."
"And if you reach the Dragon's Lair, you will face the most fearsome beast of all."
"Lead on, adventurer. Your quest awaits."
To be continued.

Rayner Ni
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